

SPECIAL BULLETIN EDITION

REFERENDUM PETITION THREATENS ALLENTOWN ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE

Anti-gay petitioners from the group calling themselves Citizens for Traditional Values have filed 2558 signatures on a referendum petition to repeal the amendment of sexual orientation and gender identity to Allentown's Human Relations Ordinance. They needed a minimum of 2000. They had 65 days to gather them. But many of the signatures are in question. If the petition holds up, a referendum will be put on the ballot in November to repeal the current law that protects GLBT people from employment, housing and public accommodation discrimination.

The CTV people who got the signatures went to churches, senior citizen centers and door to door to get people to sign. Interestingly, a large number of the people who signed have said that they were told the petition was actually a pro-gay rights petition, which they were glad to support. Others report that they were told it was about: the Green Space Bond Issue, adoption, getting a democrat on the ballot, getting a republican on the ballot, freedom of speech, pro-choice, pro-life and two people told us they were told it was to protest a movie made by gay people saying that God and his disciples were gay. Still others have no recollection of signing, and finally dimly remember someone shoving a paper under their noses at BINGO and not moving it away until they signed.

Many who signed in error are extremely angry that they have been misled. Some say they will never sign anything again. Others say that misrepresenting the information in this way should be illegal. Until now, there have never been cases of this kind of serious misrepresentation on a referendum or ballot petition in Allentown.

By the way, each of the petitioners submitted a sworn statement that they had allowed the person who signed an opportunity to read the (20 page) document they were signing. In reality, at least 80% of the people we have spoken to said that they were not even shown that there was a 20 page document to read, because the petitioners had folded the pages in such a way as to make it look like there was no information attached.

These misled voters can sign a declaration to have their names removed. PA-GALA is working every day to identify the people who want their names removed. We have gone to dozens of homes to get the signatures and have received many more by mail. Volunteers have also identified a large number of signers of the petitioner who were not registered to vote or who do not live in Allentown and so could not legally sign. We may succeed in having the petition thrown out. If we continue to have the help of volunteers and the financial support of the community, we can succeed. We have 7 days left to gather declarations. It may be close. Your help is needed.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Go to the PA-GALA booth and volunteer to help. Or call PA-GALA at 610-432-5449.
2. Make a donation to PA-GALA.
3. Be sure that none of your friends or family signed the petition without knowing what it was. If you want to confirm that someone may have signed, contact PA-GALA.
4. Write a letter to the editor of the Morning Call and the Allentown Times.

Valley Free Press does not discriminate on the bases listed in the anti-discrimination statement on page 8, and asks that organizations which request VFP to publish information about their events maintain a similar policy.

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

This issue of the Valley Free Press should have been a celebration of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Pride of the Lehigh Valley. It should have been the celebration of five years of PA-GALA, and the four year anniversary of the Valley Free Press. It should have mentioned the great strides our community has made, and the places we still have to go.

But the work fighting the referendum has taken up too much of our time to get the paper done by the time of the festival. So we created this bulletin extra issue for today, to be sure the community knows what is going on on this issue.

We'll be producing a big issue of VFP in July and sending it and handing it out to an extended list of people in the Lehigh Valley. We'll not only be getting you further news about the referendum but also news about the groups, organizations, and individuals who are and have been providing the Lehigh Valley GLBTA community with support, advocacy, information, and fun for years. This all along with other hot news, and announcements of upcoming events.

Please stay tuned. If you want to be sure you'll receive a Valley Free Press in the mail, visit the PA-GALA booth at the festival.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT??

If the worst happens and the referendum gets on the November ballot, it will be up to the community to help the voting public understand what this referendum is actually about and that the removal of basic employment and housing rights from GLBT people, is wrong. While PA-GALA will work on this effort, every other group whose mission is education, advocacy or tolerance, must work in their own way to get this message across. For the most part, every group has already been doing so since January. Thank you to everyone!

Volunteers report, that most of the people we have spoken to on the phone and door to door, are kind and tolerant and had no intention of supporting an effort to remove rights. We have spoken to hundreds of people in the last week, more than half were senior citizens. It is very positive that many of these people, who signed in churches or other places one would consider conservative, only signed because they were told that this was a pro-gay rights referendum.

WHY????

8

The Morning Call reported on June 13th that Allentown City Councilmen Lou Hershman and David K. Bausch defended their votes against the ordinance revisions, because they had wanted churches and the Boy Scouts to be exempt from the anti-discrimination law. But the human relations law does not apply to churches or private organizations like the Boy Scouts.

Even more confusing, is the fact Hershman and Bausch both voted for an amendment proposed by Tom Burke to the ordinance that passed unanimously, which actually strengthens the exemption of churches and fraternal groups. But if this referendum is successful, it will remove that stronger exemption.

Meanwhile, Hershman actually circulated a petition in his own church, going from pew to pew one Sunday telling people that it was to stop men wearing dresses to work.

MISLED???

Many people who signed the petition have reported to PA-GALA that they were misled as to the purpose of the petition and referendum.

The Morning Call quoted several people on who said they had been misled into signing. One teacher said the person gathering the signatures told her the petition was aimed at securing equal rights for gays. The title of the Morning Call article was, "We Were Tricked, Some Petition Signers Say"

**TO GET A SUBSCRIPTION
TO THE VALLEY FREE PRESS
JOIN PA-GALA BY SENDING \$20
TO: PA-GALA, P.O. BOX 20825
LEHIGH VALLEY, PA 18002**

Valley Free Press is produced by RubyZebu Productions which owns the copyright thereto. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the express permission of the editors. Editors: Elizabeth Bradbury, Patricia Sullivan; Columnists: Elizabeth Bradbury, Patricia Sullivan, Denise McKelvey, Ruby Zebu, Carolyn Lewis, Stephen Libby, Jan Ellassor, Scott Laubner, and others.

**THIS VFP WAS UNDERWRITTEN BY
ELIZABETH BRADBURY ANTIQUES LTD.**

We believe it would improve the quality of life in the Lehigh Valley if all people were equally protected from unfair discrimination based upon actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry or place of birth, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, marital status, family status, age, disability, or use of a guide animal, in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodation.

PA-GALA

Valley Free Press

Allentown Human Relations Commission

Safe-Space of Lehigh University

PFLAG Lehigh Valley

ACCO - A Chorus Celebrating Women

GLORA

Pride of the LV

LV Gay Men's Chorus

NCC GLBT Student Union

The Lehigh Valley Labor Party

EQUAL! at Agere

Metropolitan Community Church LV

OutThere - Cedar Crest

9th Street Shelter Allentown

LV Community Action Committee

GLEE at Air Products

FACT

AIDS Outreach

The Unitarian Universalist Church LV

GLOSS

LEPOCO

GLISN of Dun & Bradstreet

AIDS Services Center

Theatre Outlet

Integrity - Bethlehem

The Lehigh Valley Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Civic Theater 19th Street Theatre

The Latin Alliance

The Enigma Players

New Covenant Family Ministries

Properties of Merit

Allentown City Democratic Committee

Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem

To add your organization to this list, call 610-432-5449 or email VFP (litzirish@aol.com).

QUOTE #1

This petition, if successful, would say to our citizens and to the world that the people of Allentown do not believe in the equality and fairness guaranteed to all citizens and residents by the US Constitution...

...We at Muhlenberg support the freedom of all of Allentown's citizens to live and work peacefully and without discrimination.

From a (pro-rights) Morning Call Another View Editorial by Muhlenberg College President Arthur Taylor

QUOTES # 2 & 3

Discrimination against any group is wrong. To mislead a fair minded person into a discriminatory act is even worse.

From a Letter to the Morning Call Editor by Katherine A. Fridirici

The actions of Citizens for Traditional Values are in no way representing the values of love, acceptance, and truth, which are at the heart of Christianity, when they use lies and deceit that will take away the basic legal rights to employment and housing for gay and lesbian citizens.

From a Letter to the Morning Call Editor by Bryon Yoder

Distelfink®

by Ruby Zebu 6/02

No matter how hard they try to take our rights away, no matter how much they call us all criminals and child abusers, no matter how hateful they are, they always say they really aren't anti-gay?

OH, please...what could be more blatantly anti-gay than trying to take people's legal rights to employment and housing away?



**THIS IS NOT ABOUT VOTING ON RIGHTS,
IT'S ABOUT TRYING TO REPEAL THEM.**

The editorial columns and political cartoon that appear in Valley Free Press express the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or attitude of this publication. VFP makes no indication of the sexual orientation of persons, organizations, or businesses mentioned in any issue.